UNITED NATIONS **E**

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.5/1997/NGO/1
4 February 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Thirty-fifth session
25 February-6 March 1997
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: REVIEW OF RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION OF SOCIAL GROUPS

Statement submitted by the Foundation for the Rights of the Family (PRODEFA), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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1. FAMILY FUNCTIONS AND ROLES

A system that places people and their human security at the centre of the social development process must necessarily focus on the family, in which most people live their lives. Care, nurturing, food, clothing, housing, education, are functions that the family naturally performs in interdependence and solidarity.

While the family has undergone and continues to undergo fundamental changes, it is still recognized as the first agent of socialization of future generations and, in many societies, as the only supporting institution for older persons and persons with disabilities.

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Obviously, any policies that support the family will have an effect on the way the family can support, help, protect, educate children and young people, and provide for its vulnerable members.

Although in many cases the family can provide a buffer against short-term poverty and unemployment, policies supporting the most vulnerable families are an indispensable strategy in combating long-term and extreme poverty.

Stable families are agents of sustainable social development because of their fundamental role as the intermediate body between individuals and society. Social progress implies the constant and dynamic interaction between family structures and functions and the larger social, economic, cultural and physical environment.

2. THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE FAMILY

2.1.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 50/142 entitled "Follow-up to the International Year of the Family", paragraph 4, invited the Commission for Social Development to consider how best to integrate the follow-up to the International Year of the Family into its work programme as laid out in Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/60.

In the same resolution, paragraph 5, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive document containing the family-related provisions from the outcome of seven of the most recent international conferences, to be submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fifth session.

It is hoped that the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 will also target family issues (special session - 1996 - of the Commission for Social Development, May 1996, document on the review of the functioning of the Commission: proposals for the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 (E/CN.5/1996/4 and Corr.1)).

2.2. A DECLARATION ON THE FAMILY

Societies worldwide recognize that families have a number of social functions and responsibilities; and that they have corresponding rights. In many instances, these rights are stated, directly or indirectly, in national constitutions and laws and even in international instruments, where, while rights are not worded as such, the concept of right is implied in the repeated affirmation that the family, as the basic unit of society, is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Nevertheless, in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), the word "rights" does clearly appear, namely in chapter V of the Programme of Action entitled "The family, its roles, rights, composition and structure".

Already in 1982, several organizations, national and international and even governmental institutions, started to voice a concern about the need for a document, a declaration on the family spelling out functions, responsibilities and rights.

Several drafts were prepared to this end: an ad hoc group of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family worked for seven years and in 1993 reached a consensus on a text entitled "Guiding Principles on the Family"; the International Union of Family Organizations (IUFO) Charter was presented in 1994 to President Mitterrand of France; other national and regional texts have been coming forth in recent years.

The declaration has also been contemplated at the highest political levels, as was witnessed in 1994 during the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly (International Conference on Families).

One measure of the seriousness of the discussion on this subject was the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution 47/237 on 20 September 1993, initially recommended for adoption by the Assembly by the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-third session in 1993.

In paragraph 20 of this resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of States members of the Commission for Social Development on the desirability of working out a declaration on the roles, responsibilities and rights of families on the occasion of the International Year of the Family.

In response to that resolution, a note verbale was circulated in October 1993 to the then 32 States members of the Commission, seeking their views on this issue.

Responses were received from eight Governments: those of Belarus, Chile, Cyprus, Germany, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Sweden and Ukraine. Seven of them expressed support for the declaration on the family.

Among other responses, Cyprus expressed the opinion that the Commission for Social Development could undertake the preparation of a draft declaration, to be subsequently submitted to member States; Germany considered the "Guiding Principles on the Family", elaborated by the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, a useful basis for the United Nations declaration; Chile believed that many elements from the text of the regional Declaration of Cartagena, adopted by the preparatory meeting for the International Year of the Family, 1993, could be used for such a declaration.

In our view, the immediate and long-term follow-up to the International Year of the Family offers a suitable and fertile context for the journey to the destination, a destination which could be an integral element of that follow-up itself.

A declaration on the family should clearly support and reiterate the rights of individuals, in particular the hard-gained rights of women. Because the family is a community that individuals freely choose to form, and the family

bond, being a social link, can only derive its origin and legitimacy from the union of free and equal partners.

The perception of the family as a global unit and as an essential part of the social fabric should lead to the conclusion that a specific declaration enhancing the basic role of the family, without distinction as to ethnic origin, creed or culture, would fill the void now existing at the international level.